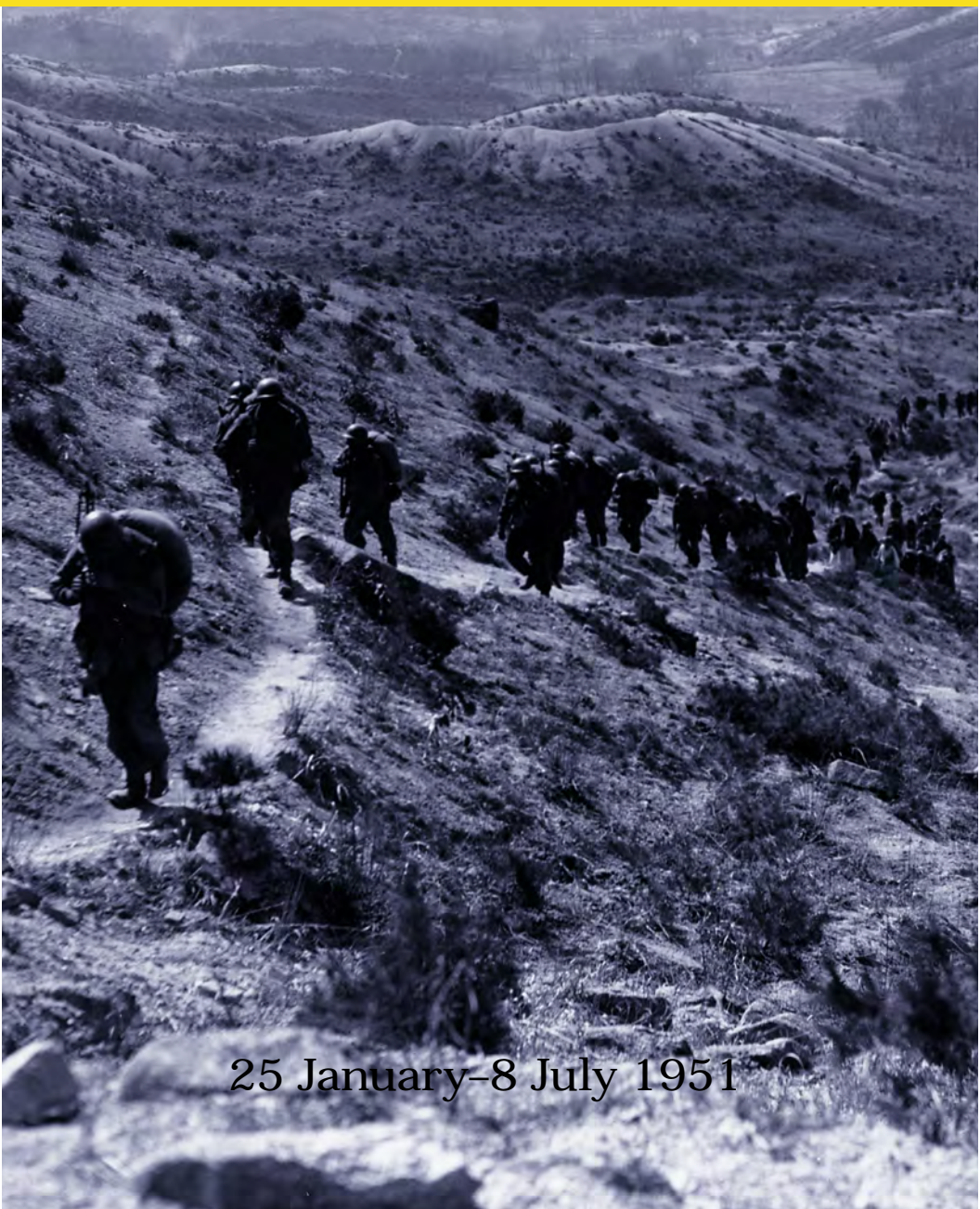


THE KOREAN WAR

RESTORING THE BALANCE



25 January–8 July 1951

Introduction

The Korean War was the first major armed clash between Free World and Communist forces, as the so-called Cold War turned hot. The half-century that now separates us from that conflict, however, has dimmed our collective memory. Many Korean War veterans have considered themselves forgotten, their place in history sandwiched between the sheer size of World War II and the fierce controversies of the Vietnam War. The recently built Korean War Veterans Memorial on the National Mall and the upcoming fiftieth anniversary commemorative events should now provide well-deserved recognition. I hope that this series of brochures on the campaigns of the Korean War will have a similar effect.

The Korean War still has much to teach us: about military preparedness, about global strategy, about combined operations in a military alliance facing blatant aggression, and about the courage and perseverance of the individual soldier. The modern world still lives with the consequences of a divided Korea and with a militarily strong, economically weak, and unpredictable North Korea. The Korean War was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over and near the Korean peninsula. It lasted three years, the first of which was a seesaw struggle for control of the peninsula, followed by two years of positional warfare as a backdrop to extended cease-fire negotiations. The following essay is one of five accessible and readable studies designed to enhance understanding of the U.S. Army's role and achievements in the Korean conflict.

During the next several years the Army will be involved in many fiftieth anniversary activities, from public ceremonies and staff rides to professional development discussions and formal classroom training. The commemoration will be supported by the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about the war. These works will provide great opportunities to learn about this important period in the Army's heritage of service to the nation.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by John J. McGrath. I hope this absorbing account, with its list of further readings, will stimulate further study and reflection. A complete listing of the Center of Military History's available works on the Korean War is included in the Center's online catalog: www.army.mil/cmhh-pg/catalog/brochure.htm.

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Restoring the Balance

25 January–8 July 1951

The period from late January to early July 1951 was critical for the United Nations (UN) Command in Korea. Recovering from the disastrous retreat that followed the *Chinese Communist Forces (CCF)* military intervention in November 1950, UN forces endured two massive *CCF* campaigns that threatened to push them off the peninsula. Amid desperate fighting, the UN troops managed to hold on, regroup, and counterattack each enemy initiative, finally establishing a strong defensive line across the middle of the peninsula. Their sacrifices finally stabilized the battlefield and provided the foundation for the cease-fire and negotiations that followed.

These bitter struggles also saw a major shift in U.S. policy and strategy. For American policymakers, the Korean War became an economy of force operation with limited objectives. The World War II concept of total victory and unconditional surrender was supplanted by the more limited goal of restoring Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) to its general prewar boundaries and implementing an effective cease-fire agreement. As one of its unexpected consequences, this strategic shift also saw the dismissal of the UN commander, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, when he openly criticized the new limitations. But with the nuclear monopoly enjoyed by the United States quickly fading, the threat of worldwide atomic war tempered the options available to U.S. officials. Campaign objectives were thus increasingly limited to gaining control of key defensible terrain and using battlefield attrition to force the other side into negotiations.

Strategic Setting

Approximately 600 miles long and between 125 and 200 miles wide, the Korean peninsula is mountainous and frequently cut by waterways of all sizes generally flowing down from the mountains into the sea. In the central section of the peninsula, where much of the fighting in early 1951 occurred, the terrain was particularly rugged. The western portion was a minor coastal plain marked by estuaries formed from the Han, Imjin, and Pukhan Rivers. In the center, the Hwach'on Reservoir was the most prominent feature. Except in the most rugged areas, villages and towns dotted the landscape. The road network was primitive and greatly affected by the weather.



By January 1951 the Korean War was six months old. The invasion by North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) in June 1950 had driven the UN forces into a headlong retreat to the Pusan Perimeter. In a spectacular reversal of fortune, the amphibious landing of UN forces at Inch'on in mid-September triggered a collapse of the *North Korean People's Army* that was only stopped by the enormity of the Chinese intervention in October and November. The entry into the war of major Chinese military forces rocked the overextended UN troops and sent them reeling back into South Korea. For a time it seemed that the UN forces might have to abandon the peninsula, resulting in a complete Communist victory.

Only by trading space for time and by pummeling the advancing Chinese with artillery fire and air strikes did the new UN commander, Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, halt the enemy.



General Ridgway
(National Archives)

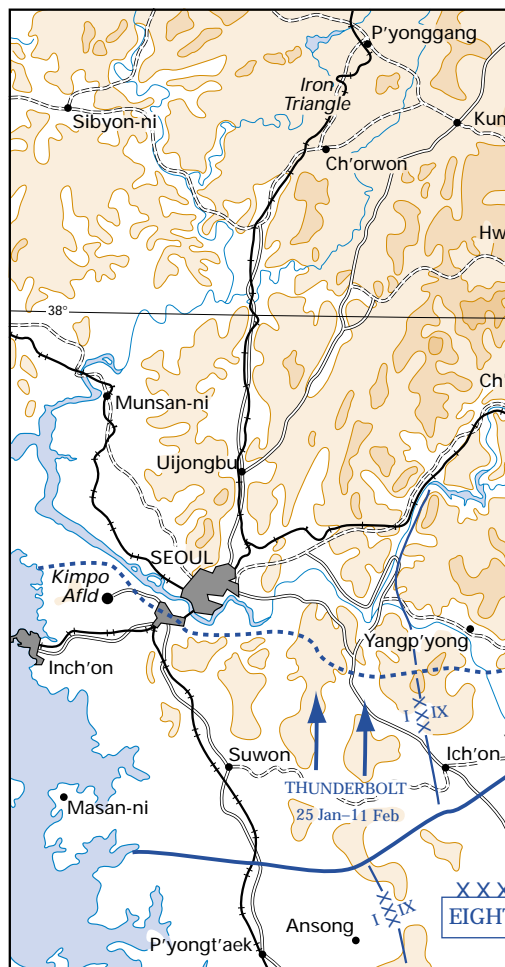
Operations

On the eve of the renewal of full-scale UN offensive operations, the Eighth Army consisted of 178,464 American soldiers and marines, 223,950 ROK Army troops, and UN ground contingents from Australia, France, India, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. These forces were organized into five corps, from west to east: I, IX, and X and the ROK III and I. In general, ROK forces held the more easily defended, rugged terrain in the east, while U.S. forces were positioned on the lower, flatter areas in the west, where their greater mobility and firepower were more decisive.

Arrayed against the UN forces were some 290,000 Chinese and North Korean soldiers. The Chinese were organized into seven corps-size armies and twenty-two divisions, 204,000 strong, primarily hold-

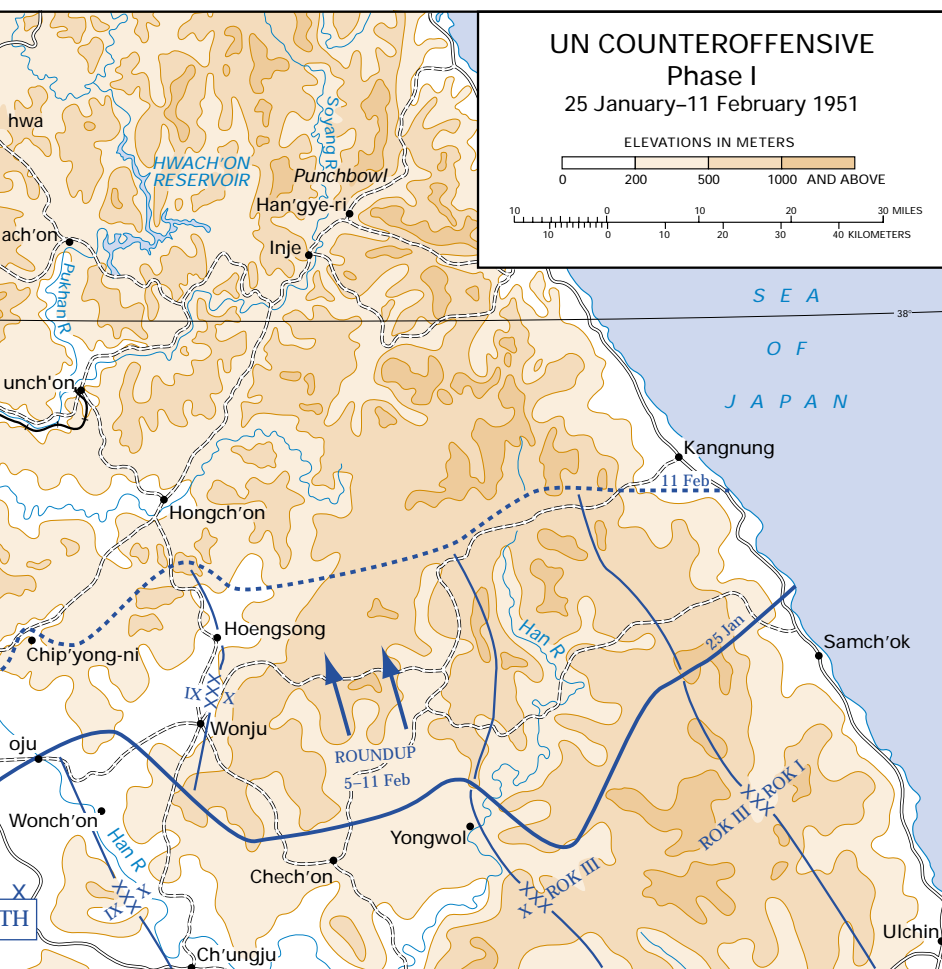
ing the western and central portions of the front. About 52,000 North Korean soldiers, in turn, organized into three corps and fourteen understrength divisions, held the eastern sector. In addition, an estimated 30,000 North Korean guerrillas were still behind UN lines in the mountainous areas of eastern South Korea. Although the Chinese had halted their offensive after heavy casualties, they had no shortage of manpower. Supply difficulties, rather than casualties, had stopped the Chinese Communists' drive south, encouraging American commanders, in turn, to resume their own offensive north.

On 20 January 1951, General Ridgway, Eighth Army commander, issued a directive designed to convert his current reconnaissance operations into a deliberate counter-attack. Since the enemy situation was still unclear, the action, code-named Operation THUNDERBOLT, was designed to discover enemy dispositions and intentions with a show of force. The operation had the additional objective of dislodging any enemy forces south of the



Han River, the major estuary running southeast from the Yellow Sea through Seoul and beyond. The projected attacks did not represent a full-scale offensive. Phase lines—lines drawn on maps with specific reporting and crossing instructions—would be used to control tightly the advance of the I and IX Corps. The units were to avoid becoming heavily engaged. To accomplish this, each corps would commit only a single U.S. division and ROK regiment. This use of terrain-based phase lines and of limited advances with large forces in reserve was to become the standard procedure for UN offensive operations for the rest of the war.

The first, or western, phase of Operation THUNDERBOLT lasted from 25 to 31 January. The I and IX Corps moved up to twenty miles



into the area south of Seoul. Only the Turkish Brigade, attached to the U.S. 25th Infantry Division, east of Osan, a major city twenty miles south of Seoul, encountered stiff resistance. Elsewhere opposition was light, and the Chinese merely conducted rearguard actions rather than hold their ground. On the twenty-sixth, Suwon, north of Osan, with its large airfield complex, was recaptured. Close air support sorties supported the advance, damaging enemy lines of communications and pounding points of resistance.

As January neared its end, Chinese resistance began gradually to increase, indicating that the main enemy line had almost been reached. On 27 January the U.S. 3d Infantry Division joined the attack in the I



The 96th Field Artillery Battalion winds its way through the mountains to the 1st Cavalry Division area, 26 January 1951. (National Archives)

Corps sector, and on the twenty-ninth Ridgway converted THUNDERBOLT into a full-scale offensive with X Corps joining the offensive on its eastern flank. The I and IX Corps continued a steady, if slow, advance to the Han River against increasingly more vigorous enemy defenses. On 2 February armored elements of the X Corps reached Wonju, located in the central section fifty miles southeast of Seoul. Other elements of the X Corps recaptured Hoengsong, ten miles north of Wonju, the same day.

As part of the I Corps attack, the U.S. 25th Infantry Division advanced against stiff enemy resistance in high ground south of Seoul. One obstacle, Hill 180, an enemy strongpoint located near Soam-ni, proved particularly difficult. Capt. Lewis L. Millett of Company E, 27th Infantry, 25th Division, led his company against that hill in a dramatic bayonet and grenade assault. The tank-infantry task force to which Millett's company belonged had been held up for several days by a determined, mixed force of Chinese and North Koreans. In the resulting hand-to-hand combat, the American shock action carried the day, routing the enemy from his well-entrenched positions atop the hill. The surviving defenders fled the battlefield, leaving their equip-

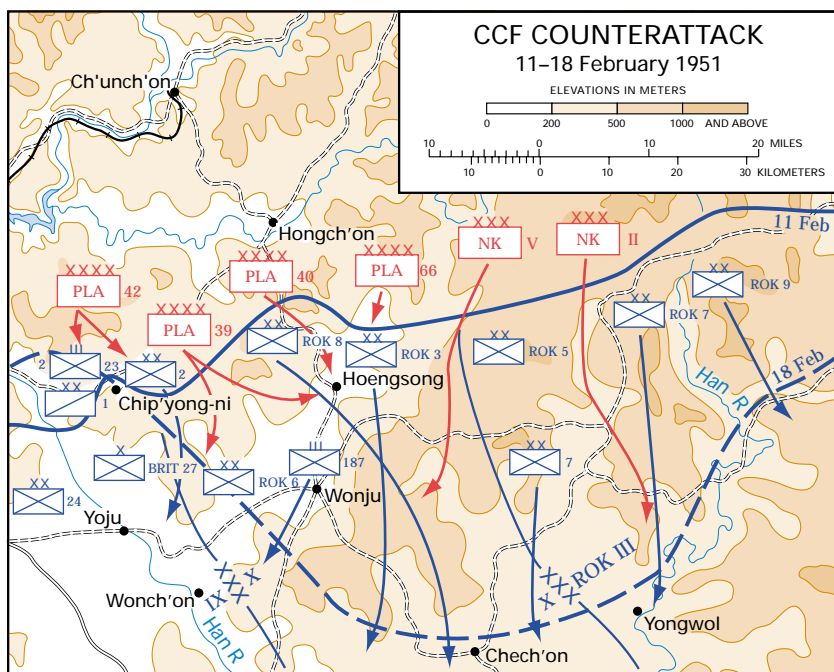
ment and weapons behind, while Millett, in the thick of the fighting, was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor.

Actions such as Millett's sustained the UN offensive despite fierce Communist resistance. On 9 February the enemy defense opposite I and IX Corps gave way. Soon UN units in the west were racing northward. The U.S. 25th Infantry Division retook Inch'on and Kimpo Airfield as elements of I Corps closed on the south bank of the Han opposite Seoul.

While the three U.S. corps advanced west and into the center, General Ridgway decided to expand the offensive to the east by committing additional elements of the X Corps and the ROK III Corps (under X Corps control) in an operation code-named ROUNDUP. ROUNDUP's object was the expansion of the offensive to the central sector of the front. The X Corps' ROK 5th and 8th Divisions were to retake Hongch'on, fifteen miles north of Hoengsong, and in the process destroy the North Korean forces in that vicinity. U.S. forces supporting the movement included the 2d and 7th Infantry Divisions and the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (RCT). ROUNDUP would also protect the right flank of THUNDERBOLT. Farther east, the ROK III Corps, on X Corps' right flank and still under its control, would also advance north. The operation commenced on 5 February, with both the X and the ROK III Corps attacking steadily, but against increasing enemy resistance.

While UN forces in Operation THUNDERBOLT advanced to an area just south of the Han against only minor resistance, Chinese and North Korean forces were massing in the central sector north of Hoengsong seeking to renew their offensive south. On the night of 11–12 February the enemy struck with five Chinese *People's Liberation Army (PLA)* armies and two North Korean corps, totaling approximately 135,000 soldiers. The main effort was against X Corps' ROK divisions north of Hoengsong. The Chinese attack, dramatically announced with bugle calls and drum beating, penetrated the ROK line and forced the South Koreans into a ragged withdrawal to the southeast via snow-covered passes in the rugged mountains. The ROK units, particularly the 8th Division, were badly battered in the process, creating large holes in the UN defenses. Accordingly, UN forces were soon in a general withdrawal to the south in the central section, giving up most of the terrain recently regained. Despite an attempt to form a solid defensive line, Hoengsong itself was abandoned on 13 February.

Also on the thirteenth the Chinese broadened the offensive against the X Corps with attacks against U.S. 2d Infantry Division positions near Chip'yong-ni, on the left of the corps' front. They also struck far-



ther to the west out of a bridgehead south of the Han near Yangp'yong against elements of the U.S. 24th Infantry Division, holding the IX Corps' right flank. The 21st Infantry of the 24th Division quickly contained the Yangp'yong attack that was aimed toward Suwon, but at Chip'yong-ni the Chinese encircled the 2d Division's 23d Infantry and its attached French Army battalion, cleverly exploiting a gap in the overextended American lines.

Chip'yong-ni was a key road junction surrounded by a ring of small hills. Rather than have the 23d Infantry withdraw, General Ridgway directed that the position be held to block or delay Chinese access to the nearby Han River Valley. An enemy advance down the east bank of the Han would threaten the positions of the IX and I Corps west of the river. Accordingly, the UN forces at Chip'yong-ni dug into the surrounding hills and formed a solid perimeter while reinforcements were mustered. The role of the Air Force was essential at Chip'yong-ni with close air support forcing the attackers to conduct their assaults only after dark. And once the enemy had cut off the ground routes, all resupply was by air.

As Ridgway hoped, the 5,000 defenders of Chip'yong-ni quickly became the focus of Chinese attention. Throughout the night of 13-14

February, three Chinese divisions assaulted the perimeter, supported by artillery. The attackers shifted to different sections of the two-mile American perimeter probing for weak points. The Chinese were often stopped only at the barbed wire protecting the individual American positions, with the defenders employing extensive artillery support and automatic weapons fire from an attached antiaircraft artillery battalion. Daylight brought a respite to the attacks. True to form, the Chinese renewed their assaults the night of 14–15 February. Again the fighting was intense. During the 14 February attack, Sfc. William Sitman, a machine gun section leader in Company M, 23d Infantry, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in providing support to an infantry company, in the end placing his body between an enemy grenade and five fellow soldiers.

While the 23d Infantry held on at Chip'yong-ni, the situation to the southeast was grave. At the time Ridgway and Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, the X Corps commander, were seeking to stabilize the front line between Chip'yong-ni and Wonju, where the destruction of the ROK forces around Hoengsong had created major gaps in the defensive line. For three desperate days, the front wavered as the Chinese attempted to exploit these gaps before UN reinforcements could arrive on the scene. Ridgway acted quickly to push units into the critical areas, ordering IX Corps to move the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade and the ROK 6th Division over to X Corps and into the gap south of Chip'yong-ni. The action proved timely. On the night of 13–14 February, the Chinese conducted major assaults at Chip'yong-ni, Ch'uam-ni, five miles southeast of Chip'yong-ni, and at Wonju. But supported by massed artillery and air support, the UN forces repulsed the attacks, causing heavy Chinese casualties.

To provide additional support, the IX Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Bryant E. Moore, now began directly assisting the X Corps in restoring the front and relieving Chip'yong-ni. On 14 February the 5th Cavalry, detached from the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division, was taken out of IX Corps reserve and assigned the relief mission. For the task, the three infantry battalions of the 5th Cavalry were reinforced with two field artillery battalions, two tank companies, and a company each of combat engineers and medics. Initially the relief force advanced rapidly, making half the twelve-mile distance to Chip'yong-ni from the main U.S. defensive line on the first day. Damaged bridges and roadblocks then slowed movement. On the morning of the fifteenth, two of the infantry battalions assaulted enemy positions on the high ground north of the secondary road leading to Chip'yong-ni. When the attack stalled against firm Chinese resistance, Col. Marcel Crombez, 5th

Cavalry commander, organized a force of twenty-three tanks, with infantry and engineers riding on them, to cut through the final six miles to the 23d Infantry. The tank-infantry force advanced in the late afternoon, using mobility and firepower to run a gauntlet of enemy defenses. Poor coordination between the tanks and supporting artillery made progress slow. Nevertheless, in an hour and fifteen minutes the task force reached the encircled garrison and spent the night there. At daylight the tanks returned to the main body of the relief force unopposed and came back to Chip'yong-ni spearheading a supply column. With the defenders resupplied and linked up with friendly forces, the siege could be considered over. UN casualties totaled 404, including 52 soldiers killed. Chinese losses were far greater. Captured documents later revealed that the enemy suffered at least 5,000 casualties. The defense of Chip'yong-ni was a major factor in the successful blunting of the Chinese counteroffensive in February 1951 and a major boost to UN morale.

Elsewhere on 15 February, the efforts to restore the front finally bore fruit. Rather than take advantage of the weakened front to the east, the Chinese had chosen to concentrate on eliminating the U.S. forces at Chip'yong-ni first. But they had chosen poorly, and the respite allowed Moore and Almond to restore their lines. Reinforcements, particularly the U.S. 7th Infantry Division and 187th Airborne RCT, helped the South Koreans form a solid line around Wonju and near Chech'on, twenty miles to the southwest. By the eighteenth the Communist offensive was spent, and enemy forces began withdrawing to the north rather than attempting to hold what they had taken. Such tactics would become the familiar way that the Communists would indicate the end of their offensives. Heavy casualties and the need for resupply and reorganization frequently forced the Chinese to break direct contact and pull back. UN firepower was simply too strong.

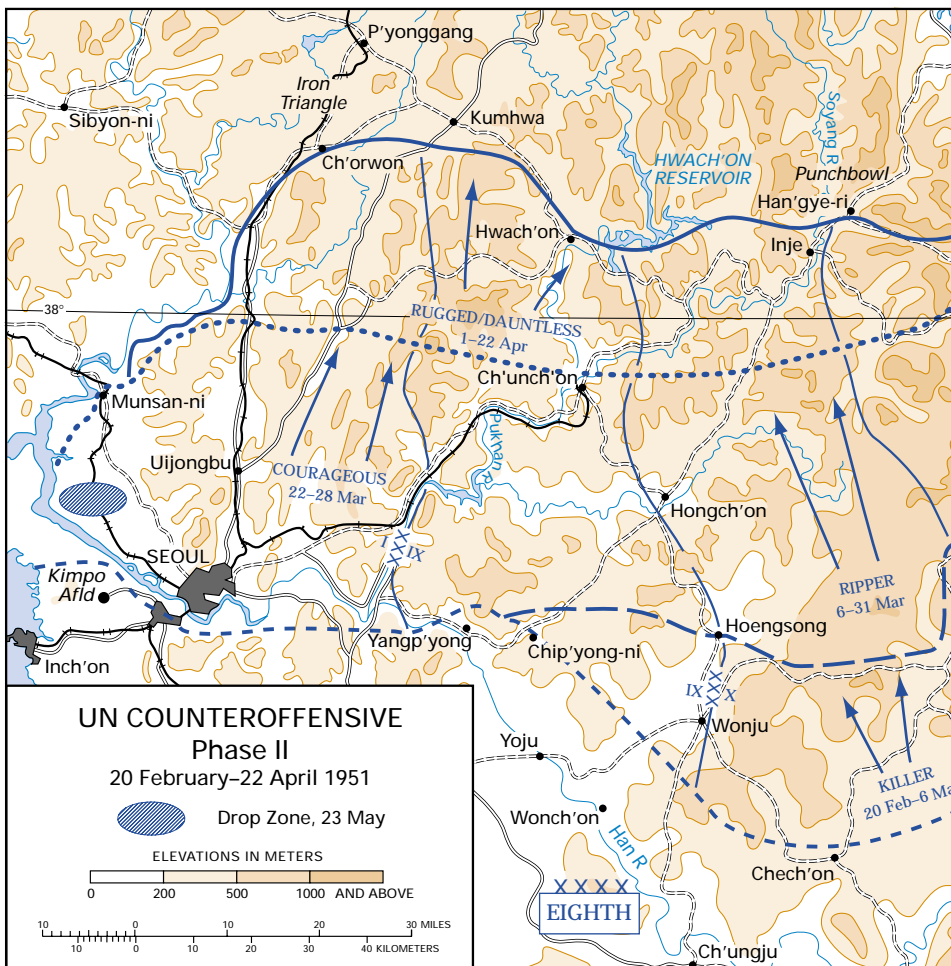
With the enemy withdrawing, Ridgway immediately ordered an advance by the IX Corps, while the X Corps moved to destroy the Communist forces around Chech'on in the central sector. By the nineteenth the initiative had completely shifted back to the United Nations Command. The new offensive became formalized on 20 February as Operation KILLER. Ridgway hoped that the name would help encourage an offensive spirit in the Eighth Army. The IX, X, and ROK III Corps were directed north toward a line, named Arizona, running from Yangp'yong east to positions north of Hoengsong and along the east-west portion of the Wonju-Kangnung highway, all about twelve to fifteen miles above the current front line. The operation was designed to



M4 tanks of the 89th Tank Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, cross the Han River, 7 March 1951. (National Archives)

enhance the damage to enemy forces and in practice proved methodical, often slowed by the spring thaw and heavy rains that swelled streams and turned roads into seas of mud. By 28 February all units had reached their KILLER objectives, in the process finally eliminating all enemy forces south of the Han River. Nevertheless, many enemy units escaped by withdrawing north under cover of inclement weather.

With General MacArthur's support, Ridgway planned a new operation, code-named RIPPER, to continue the advance twenty to thirty miles northward to a new line, Idaho. Line Idaho was in an arc with its apex just south of the 38th Parallel. The major objectives of RIPPER included the recapture of Seoul and of the towns of Hongch'on, fifty miles west of Seoul, and Ch'unch'on, fifteen miles farther to the north. However, the destruction of enemy forces continued to be more important than geographical objectives. Although the removal of all Communist forces from areas south of the 38th Parallel and the restoration of South Korea's prewar boundaries remained a broad strategic objective, weakening the enemy's military power was the primary operational goal.



RIPPER commenced on 7 March with the I and IX Corps on the west near Seoul and Hoengsong and X and ROK III Corps in the east. One of the largest UN artillery bombardments of the war preceded the offensive. On the left, the U.S. 25th Infantry Division quickly crossed the Han and established a bridgehead. Farther to the east, IX Corps reached its first phase line on 11 March. Three days later the advance proceeded to the next phase line. During the night of 14–15 March, elements of the ROK 1st Division and U.S. 3d Infantry Division liberated Seoul. The capital city changed hands for the fourth and last time in the war. The Communist forces were compelled to abandon it when the UN approach to the east of the city threatened the defenders with encirclement.



Following the recapture of Seoul, Communist forces retreated northward, conducting skillful delaying actions that utilized the rugged, muddy terrain to maximum advantage, particularly in the mountainous X Corps sector. Despite such obstacles, RIPPER pressed on throughout March. In the mountainous central region, the IX and X Corps pushed forward methodically, the IX Corps against light opposition and the X Corps against staunch enemy defenses. Hongch'on was taken on the fifteenth and Ch'unch'on secured on the twenty-second. The capture of Ch'unch'on was the last major ground objective of Operation RIPPER. UN forces had advanced north an average of thirty miles from their start lines. However, while the Eighth Army units had occupied their principal geographic objectives, the goal of destroying enemy forces and equipment had again proved elusive. More often than not, the enemy withdrew before he could receive extensive damage. Ch'unch'on, a major Communist supply hub, was empty

by the time UN forces finally occupied it.

Even with RIPPER in its final stages, Ridgway's staff was planning a new operation. Code-named COURAGEOUS, it was designed to trap large Chinese and North Korean forces in the area between the Han and Imjin Rivers north of Seoul, opposite I Corps. The operation featured a parachute drop by the 187th Airborne RCT onto the south bank of the Imjin River near Munsan-ni, twenty miles north of the current front line, and a rapid advance by an armored task force. Both the airborne drop, which used over a hundred C-119 Flying Boxcar transport aircraft, and the armored movement were successfully executed. The drop took place on 22 March, and Task Force Growdon (made up



Chinese prisoners captured north of the Imjin River by the 1st Cavalry Division (National Archives)

of armored elements from the U.S. 24th Infantry Division's 6th Medium Tank Battalion, borrowed from IX Corps, and infantry elements from the U.S. 3d Infantry Division) linked up with the paratroopers on the twenty-third. The 187th faced only weak resistance, and the armored task force faced primarily minefields rather than active defenses. However, once again Communist forces withdrew more rapidly than the UN forces could advance to trap them.

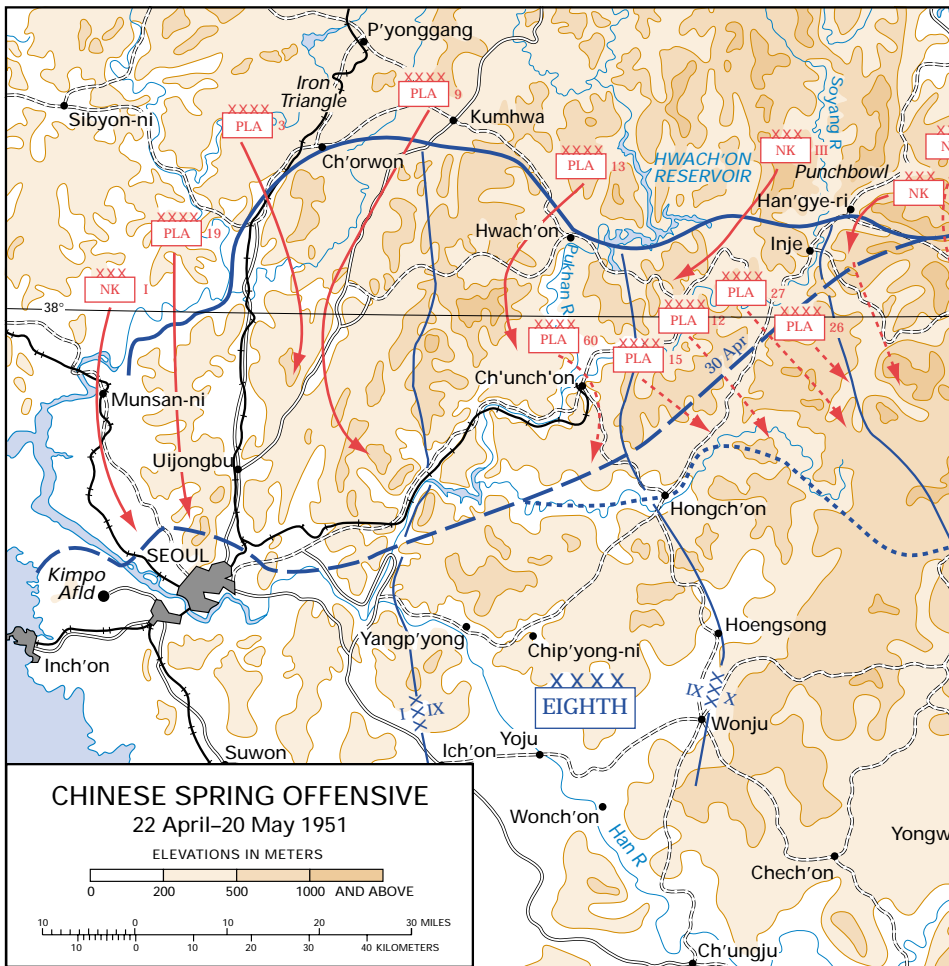
As March 1951 drew to a close Eighth Army units were nearing the 38th Parallel. However, with indications that the Chinese and North Koreans were massing forces for a spring offensive, Ridgway decided to move even farther north to secure more defensible positions. President Harry S. Truman and General MacArthur agreed. The new advance was divided into two sub-operations code-named RUGGED and DAUNTLESS. The first, Operation RUGGED, was designed to secure a new line, Kansas, just north of the 38th Parallel. The second, Operation DAUNTLESS, would see the UN forces continue twenty miles farther to the north to another line, designated Wyoming. Wyoming would then be transformed into a heavily defended outpost line. When the Communists opened their next offensive, the forces along Wyoming were to conduct a fighting withdrawal south to Line Kansas, while causing the maximum amount of casualties and dis-

ruption to the enemy. The main defensive battle would then be fought along Kansas. Ridgway also intended DAUNTLESS to threaten the enemy logistical hub located in a region nicknamed the Iron Triangle, northwest of Kumhwa, a crossroads town twenty miles north of Line Kansas.

The two-phase operation began on 1 April, with the I and IX Corps in the west and the ROK I Corps in the east reaching Line Kansas by the fifth. In the center, the X and ROK III Corps were also closing in on the line after a late start. Then the I and IX Corps moved forward toward Ch'orwon, southwest of the Iron Triangle, and reached an intermediate phase line, Utah, by the eleventh. To their right, X Corps forces took a dam overlooking the Hwach'on Reservoir five days later. On 20 April, the last UN forces, the U.S. 7th Infantry Division and the ROK 3d Division of the X Corps, reached Line Kansas. Final preparations began to continue the advance to Line Wyoming. However, all UN offensive action ceased when Communist forces launched their spring offensive across the entire front on 22 April.

During Operation RUGGED turbulence at the higher American command levels led to significant leadership changes in the Far East Command and the Eighth Army. On 10 April, as the result of a disagreement over strategy, President Truman relieved General MacArthur as Commander in Chief, U.S. Far East Command, replacing him with General Ridgway. Four days later, Lt. Gen. James A. Van Fleet, in turn, replaced Ridgway as Eighth Army commander. MacArthur had long chafed at the limitations imposed on him, especially those restricting direct action against the People's Republic of China. In March he expressed his views in a letter to Congressman Joseph Martin of Massachusetts, who made the letter public in early April. Truman saw the action as just one more example of MacArthur's attempts to defy his authority as Commander in Chief. Accordingly, after consulting with selected members of his cabinet and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the president removed the venerable and popular World War II general. This action created a political firestorm in the United States, but its impact on battlefield operations, other than the change at the highest levels of command, was minimal.

The new offensive was the Chinese's fifth of the war. At the time, UN forces were astride or slightly north of Line Kansas, which extended 116 miles from the confluence of the Han and Imjin Rivers on the west, following the Imjin northeast to the 38th Parallel, then generally following the parallel easterly along good defensive terrain to the Sea of Japan. The lead units of the I and IX Corps had advanced forward



of Kansas to Line Utah, well on their way to Line Wyoming. Both corps took the brunt of the offensive conducted by three Chinese army groups (called *fronts* by the Chinese) and a North Korean corps converging from the north and northwest and aiming for the northeast-southwest corridor leading fifty miles down to Seoul (the Yonch'on-Uijongbu-Seoul corridor).

The offensive actually began in the center of the UN line during the night of 21–22 April with a Chinese assault on the ROK 6th Division west of the Hwach'on Reservoir. The weight of the enemy attack broke through the division, exposing the flanks of the adjacent U.S. 24th Infantry Division in the X Corps sector to the west and the



U.S. 1st Marine Division to the east. A follow-on Chinese push the next day completed the collapse of the ROK 6th and advanced south of Kap'yong, twenty miles southwest of the reservoir. There elements of the British 27th Brigade and the attached U.S. 72d Tank Battalion finally held off the attacking Chinese forces, enabling an orderly UN withdrawal. For this action Company A, 72d Tank Battalion, and the Australian and Canadian battalions of the British brigade were later awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

In the I Corps sector, the 24th Division and the Turkish Brigade bore the direct impact of the Chinese main effort. The I and IX Corps immediately began withdrawing southward to prepared positions along Line Kansas. These objectives were reached the next day. Also in the I Corps, multinational UN forces from Belgium, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the United States were fighting a series of intense battles as the enemy crossed the Imjin River and estab-

lished bridgeheads on the southern bank. By the twenty-third most I and IX Corps units were back on Line Kansas.

Also on 23 April the Chinese offensive expanded to the east and east-central areas. A successful North Korean advance against the ROK 5th Division in the center, on the right flank of the X Corps, enabled the enemy to move below Line Kansas and Inje, the major town located in the west halfway between the Hwach'on Reservoir and the Sea of Japan. Along the Imjin, the Chinese penetrated between the positions of the ROK 1st Division and the British 29th Brigade in the I Corps sector. Enemy forces then surrounded the 29th Brigade's Gloucestershire Battalion on a hilltop near Solma-ri, several miles

south of the Imjin. The Gloucesters put up a heroic defense, which later won them a U.S. Presidential Unit Citation. When relief attempts failed to reach the battalion and an early breakout effort collapsed on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth, the battalion attempted to break out on its own and was destroyed, with most of its surviving members captured. The inability of I Corps to extract the Gloucestershire Battalion was due to a combination of factors: poor decisions, unreliable communications, rough terrain, and determined enemy resistance. The cost was heavy: 20 British soldiers killed, 35 wounded, and 575 missing in action and presumed captured.

Despite the extensive use of air strikes and massed artillery, the multiple enemy penetrations destroyed Eighth Army hopes of establishing a firm defensive line along Kansas. On 25 April Maj. Gen. Frank W. Milburn, the I Corps commander, ordered a further withdrawal to a new line, Delta, located roughly ten miles south of Kansas, and a subsequent fall back to a line closer to Seoul designated Golden. It was now obvious that the objective of the Chinese offensive was nothing less than the recapture of Seoul. The withdrawal of I Corps forced Van Fleet to move the rest of the Eighth Army back all across its front. He hurriedly created a new line as an extension of Golden across the whole peninsula, which he ironically named the No Name line.

The fighting during the Chinese spring offensive was again extremely bitter. In the three-day period of 24–26 April 1951 alone, six American soldiers earned Medals of Honor, including four awarded to members of the 7th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division. Three were posthumous: Cpl. John Essebagger, Company A; Pfc. Charles L. Gilliland, Company I; and Cpl. Clair Goodblood, Company D. Cpl. Hiroshi Miyamura of Company H also earned the medal. All four distinguished themselves with exceptional gallantry in separate defensive actions against large assaulting enemy forces, inflicting disproportionately heavy casualties on the attackers.

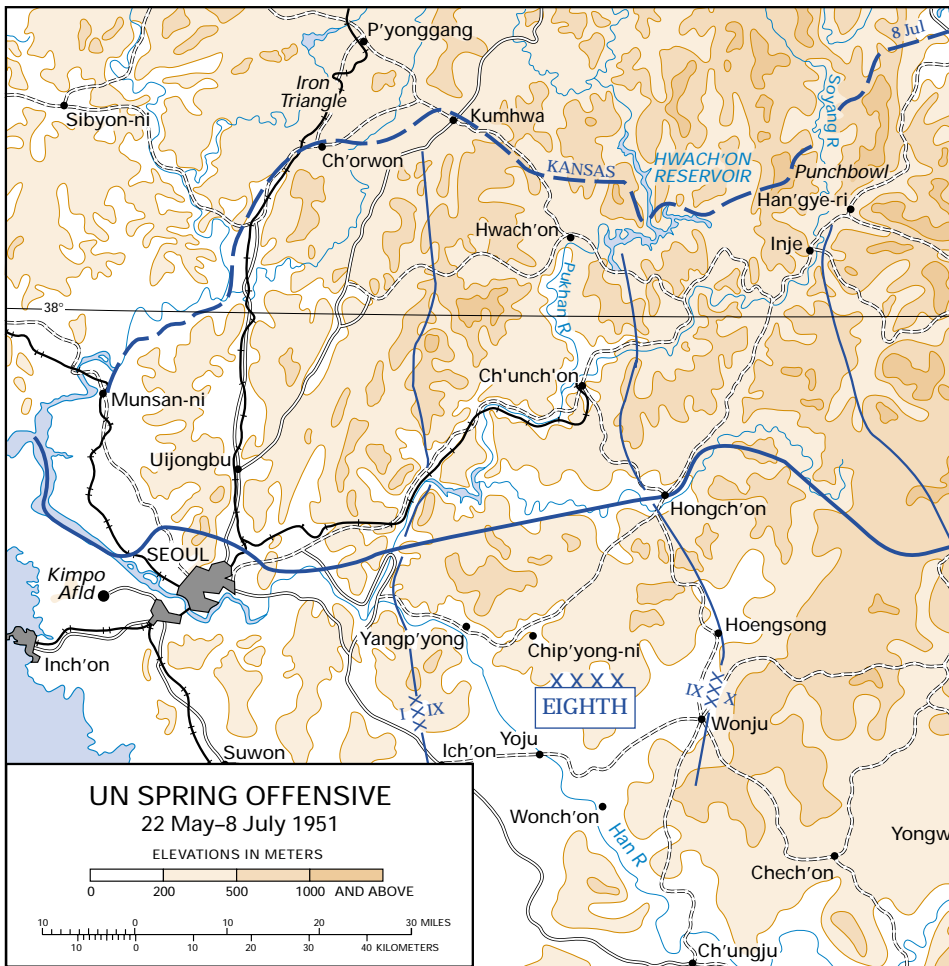
The Eighth Army completed its withdrawal to the No Name line by 28 April. Although torrential rainstorms slowed the maneuver, they hindered the Chinese advance as well. The new defenses were sited on good terrain and held. Once the Chinese attack was spent, UN forces limited their activities to patrolling and local counterattacks. The Communists had failed to recapture Seoul and, with UN forces in good defensible positions, any renewed offensive would face even less chance of succeeding.

The new Eighth Army line extended from the Han estuary east in an arc six miles north of Seoul and then continued east along the Han



*The 65th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division, withdraws to Line Utah;
below, escorting a wounded 25th Division infantryman down the
hill to an aid station, 2 April 1951. (National Archives)*





for twenty miles to the town of Tokso-ri, then northeast across the peninsula to Taep'o-ri, a port on the east coast. On 30 April, fearing a new Communist effort to take Seoul, General Van Fleet started shifting forces westward, shoring up the area around the capital. This left a primarily ROK force in the mountainous sectors of the X and ROK III Corps. He also fortified the line as much as possible. While Eighth Army units improved their positions over the next week, the front was quiet, with little contact between opposing forces. Van Fleet, taking advantage of the lull, issued instructions for the Eighth Army to advance forty miles back to Line Kansas. On 9 May UN forces made



limited attacks north, while intensifying preparations for yet another major offensive slated to begin on the twelfth. But on the eleventh, intelligence indicated that the enemy was once again ready to renew his own offensive, and all UN attack planning was halted.

The Chinese Communists' renewed offensive began on 16 May. This time the enemy struck the eastern portion of the front, along the boundary between the X Corps and ROK III Corps. The Chinese had shifted five armies eastward between 10 and 16 May, and the attack came across the Soyang River against four ROK divisions. The ROK 5th and 7th Divisions, under X Corps control, were withdrawn southward in a matter of hours. However, the ROK III Corps failed to extract its two threatened units, the ROK 3d and 9th Divisions, and the Chinese quickly destroyed both and poured through the resulting gap. The enemy advanced as far as Soksa-ri, thirty-five miles south of the original front.

West of the breakthrough the X Corps' U.S. 2d Infantry Division attempted to stem the Chinese tide.

In addition to facing fierce enemy attacks to its front, the division had to contend with the collapse of the ROK units on its right flank. But despite heavy losses, the division held its ground. Meanwhile, Van Fleet rushed the U.S. 3d Infantry Division to the X Corps from Seoul to cover the ROK III Corps' withdrawal. Reassuringly, in the east the ROK I Corps continued to conduct an orderly retreat to a new line along the main east-west Kangnung-Soksa-ri road.

The combination of the stiff resistance of units such as the U.S. 2d Infantry Division, the orderly withdrawal of the ROK forces in the east, and the shifting of reinforcements stopped the Communist advance. As



Engineers probe for enemy mines ahead of a creeping tank south of Ch'orwon, 10 June 1951. (National Archives)

in all previous Chinese offensives, the attack lost its impetus after a couple of days when the combination of heavy casualties and poor resupply caught up with the Communist troops. In typical fashion, the enemy fell back to regroup, allowing the UN front to stabilize. Unknown to the defenders, this was to be the last major Chinese offensive of the war.

Unwilling to give the enemy a chance to reorganize for another attack, Van Fleet directed the Eighth Army to shift immediately onto the offensive. Once again the goal was to regain the better defensive positions of Line Kansas slightly north of the 38th Parallel. The new UN advance was also designed to exact maximum enemy casualties and, hopefully, destroy or cut off major enemy units. The counteroffensive quickly secured positions along key road networks in the central area around the towns of Hwach'on and Inje, inflicting heavy casualties in the process. Inje and Hwach'on were back in Eighth Army hands by 27 May, and escape routes south of the Hwach'on Reservoir were severed. However, mud, rain, and effective Chinese delaying actions impeded efforts to close all of the escape routes, precluding the complete destruction of enemy forces and supply bases.

On 1 June Secretary of State Dean Acheson indicated U.S. willingness to accept a cease-fire line in the vicinity of the 38th Parallel.

At the time UN forces were again at, or slightly north of, the parallel. The secretary of state's feeler expressed a policy espoused earlier in May by President Truman, which in turn imposed definite limitations on the Eighth Army's advance. Once UN forces reached the defensible positions of Line Kansas and its outpost Line Wyoming, the attack north would stop and measures would be taken to fortify the front. On 11 June the U.S. 3d Infantry Division, in the I Corps zone, captured Ch'orwon on Line Wyoming south of the Iron Triangle. By the fifteenth UN forces had closed on Line Kansas everywhere, while in the west the I and IX Corps had moved in force to Line Wyoming, securing the lateral road running east-west between Ch'orwon and Kumhwa, fifteen miles to the east.

For the rest of June, UN forces continued to improve their defensive positions, heavily fortifying Line Kansas. Meanwhile the Air Force, with mixed success, executed Operation STRANGLE, a massive effort to interdict Communist supply routes by air. The UN line was anchored in the west along the Han estuary just south of the 38th Parallel. From there it extended to the northeast south of the Iron Triangle, curved around the UN-controlled Hwach'on Reservoir, and then rose steeply north to meet the Sea of Japan on the east coast forty-two miles north of the parallel. With minor modifications, this front became the cease-fire line agreed to in 1953 and is still in place a half-century later.

On 23 June the Soviet ambassador to the UN called for cease-fire negotiations. As the real possibility of negotiations loomed, Eighth Army forces continued to improve their positions, building strong-points and conducting active patrolling. Since April the enemy had suffered more than 200,000 casualties and heavy losses in equipment, drastically impairing his ability to conduct large-scale offensive operations. On 2 July the Chinese and North Koreans finally agreed to cease-fire negotiations. The parties agreed on the choice of Kaesong, a village north of the front line in the eastern sector, as the site for the talks, and the meetings formally began in early July. The negotiations marked the end to major offensives conducted by both sides. However, both the talks and the fighting would continue for two long years, with the war characterized by small-scale infantry battles to gain control of hilltops and other tactically critical pieces of terrain. Despite peace talks, the war was not yet over.

Analysis

The winter and spring campaigns of 1951 are a bridge between the mobile battles of 1950 and the static warfare that marked the last two

years of the war. The defeat of the Communist advance into South Korea and the restoration of a firm defensive line roughly along the 38th Parallel decided the outcome of the war and guaranteed the future of South Korea. U.S. and UN resolve in the subsequent summer fighting brought the Chinese and North Koreans to the peace table. The American response to the shock of the Chinese intervention evolved into a firm determination to limit the objectives of the war to the continued existence of South Korea. There would be no reconquest of North Korea or any widening of the war. This strategic shift led to the dismissal of its principal opponent, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Wars and operations with limited strategic objectives have been a feature of American global strategy ever since.

The concept of limited war affected the Army in many ways. In April 1951 the United States armed forces adopted an individual rotation policy. American soldiers were no longer expected to remain in the theater of operations for the duration of the conflict but would now be rotated back to the United States after a specific period of time, roughly a year. U.S. forces would subsequently follow a similar rotation policy in Vietnam. Theater commanders could expect only a limited number of reinforcements and replacements, with inadequate training and personnel turbulence becoming familiar problems as experienced personnel steadily returned to the United States.

Tactically, UN forces had proved able to handle the Chinese and North Koreans on their own terms. After restoring the front line near the original 38th Parallel demarcation line, despite some perilous moments, the UN halted rather promptly the massive *CCF* spring offensive and quickly regained the lost ground. Although the enemy often took advantage of the hastily organized and equipped ROK divisions, those units improved considerably by mid-1951. UN commanders had learned how to deal with the Chinese style of warfare—characterized by furious offensive operations, only marginally sustained, followed by withdrawal and regrouping. Failed offensives convinced the Communists that the conquest of South Korea was no longer possible under the existing conditions and made the cease-fire table an appealing option.

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CCF SPRING OFFENSIVE 1951



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*Cover: 3d Division infantrymen climb the trail to their objective near
Uijongbu, 23 March 1951. (National Archives)*

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